

His kiss 581

Chapter 581

Rebecca frowned, still anxious.

Wesley showed no interest in her, and with their engagement still unofficial, she feared he might back out. Desperate and without a better plan, she had resorted to crude tactics to drive Gabriela out of Okburg.

“No more excuses,” Lauren cut in. “Leave these matters to me.”

She was no stranger to dirty work, even murder. Disposing of Gabriela would be trivial.

Rebecca’s face lit up with relief. “Thank you, Mom!”

Leaving the Howards’ house, Gabriela turned to Tyler with a grin. “I scored a hundred million today. I’m splitting it with you.”

Tyler chuckled. “You earned it fair and square. Why share it with me?”

“Because you helped me fight off those thugs and get the truth out of them,” she replied. “You can treat your men to a meal with this money.”

Without waiting for his protest, she transferred fifty million to him, leaving no room for refusal.

When they arrived at Tyler's place, Aubrey and Tessa crowded around with concern, eager for an update.

Gabriela recounted what had happened after their visit to the Howards.

Aubrey's eyes widened with envy. "The Howard family is really loaded. They handed over a hundred million just like that."

The Howard family's empire of supermarkets spanned the country and beyond, with other lucrative ventures hidden beneath the surface.

Even the richest families paled in comparison.

Gabriela smirked. "Now that I think about it, I went too easy on them. I should have demanded two hundred million."

Her bold words left Aubrey and the others speechless. Her exposure to wealth made a hundred million seem like pocket change.

Gabriela then headed to the kitchen, rolled up her sleeves, and prepared an extravagant feast for Tyler's birthday.

Urged on by the women, Tyler closed his eyes to make a wish. Gabriela and the others showered him with gifts, bringing tears to his eyes.

At nearly six-foot-three, the tough-looking man had a surprisingly tender heart.

Tessa raised her glass to toast Tyler, her smile warm as she wished him a happy birthday. Tyler, flustered, quickly reciprocated.

A gruff guy by nature, he rarely remembered his own birthday. Yet this year's simple celebration felt unforgettable.

After dinner, Tyler drove Gabriela and the others home.

It had been a joyful day for them.

But not everyone shared their happiness.

Word of Gabriela's clash with the Howard family reached Jasper's ears.

He was genuinely surprised. "Gabriela is really something."

It had been years since anyone dared to confront the Howard family so boldly.

Luther looked troubled as he continued, "There's more bad news, Mr. Howard."

"Go on," Jasper urged.

"The Haynes Group hasn't halted the hotel project," Luther said quickly. "Gabriela secured a loan recently and got another hundred million from Miss Howard today."

The financial gap had been bridged.

Jasper's expression darkened. "So we can't take back the hotel?"

Luther nodded. "It seems that way."

Due to the contract Orion and Gabriela had signed, in which he was at fault, the hotel had to be unconditionally gifted to the Haynes Group.

Jasper's plan to reclaim it after her financial collapse had fallen apart.

Rebecca, who had entered quietly, overheard Luther's report. Her anxiety surged. "The hotel Jasper sank five hundred million into was just handed to Gabriela? That's ridiculous!"

Luther shared Jasper's frustration, but the reality was undeniable.

Gabriela had an uncanny ability to turn the tables, no matter what hardships she faced. Despite being a small-scale entrepreneur, every move Jasper and Rebecca made against her backfired.

Now she not only received a hotel for free, but had also gotten a hundred million from the Howards.

Chapter 582

Jasper caught the flicker of displeasure in Rebecca's expression and, with a steady hand, calmed her with a light, reassuring gesture.

"Things have already spiraled enough. Don't lower your dignity any further," he said, his tone even and unhurried. "It's only a hotel. Handing it over to Gabriela doesn't matter. What I want to see is whether she dares to take what I place in front of her."

The measured calm in his voice told Rebecca all she needed to know—he held a poor impression of Gabriela. That thought eased some of the tension twisting in her chest.

Then Jasper's eyes shifted toward her. "I heard you went after her today, only to end up humiliated instead?"

"She came looking for money!" Rebecca shot back immediately, her voice sharp with disdain. Her eyes burned with contempt as she added, "She wasn't even hurt, yet she ran to my parents and falsely accused me. My father actually slapped me because of her!"

"Try using your head next time." Jasper's gaze lingered on her, his tone calm yet firm. "Leave this kind of dirty work to others. You need to keep your hands clean."

Realizing he wasn't truly condemning her, Rebecca's heart lightened. She leaned closer with a quick, eager nod. "Alright. From now on, I'll check with you before I act on anything."

Wesley also caught wind of what had happened.

Just picturing Gabriela's brazen behavior left him torn between laughter and disbelief.

"She's got some nerve," he muttered with a crooked smile. "Marching into the Howards' house to demand money? Bold little thing."

Gabriela never seemed to miss a single chance to squeeze profit from chaos.

She should consider herself fortunate that Matthew was a reasonable man; another might have lashed out at her.

Billy sounded equally astonished. “A hundred million—Gabriela actually had the nerve to ask for that. And Mr. Howard really handed it over, then even apologized to her in person.”

He couldn’t help but marvel at her nerve. Whatever methods Gabriela had used against the Howard family, the outcome was nothing short of extraordinary.

Wesley let out a low laugh, then gave his order. “Over the next few days, place a few people around her for protection.”

If not for Tyler’s intervention today, the fallout could have been disastrous.

“Got it,” Billy answered at once.

That hundred million stirred mixed emotions across the board—delight for some, bitter frustration for others.

Gabriela was so thrilled that she rewarded herself with a designer bag, while Rebecca lay awake the entire night, restless and brooding.

She flipped from side to side, unable to settle, her mind churning with schemes to cause Gabriela more grief.

When morning came, her cousin Cindy Howard invited her out shopping.

Cindy had always been eager to curry favor with Rebecca. Rebecca, however, was still sulking and had no desire to leave the house.

But Cindy coaxed her gently, “Fashion Lane just got their new summer arrivals. Let’s go see them. You are gorgeous and refined—this summer, you should be wearing the most stunning pieces.”

The sweet flattery soothed Rebecca’s temper, and with a flicker of pride warming her chest, she finally agreed to accompany Cindy.

At Fashion Lane, the two of them unexpectedly ran into Gabriela, who was leisurely browsing the racks.

Chapter 583

What a small world.

Gabriela behaved as though Rebecca didn’t exist, calmly selecting a dress before slipping into the fitting room.

It was a skirt suit in a subdued gray, understated yet refined.

The outfit exuded a quiet, timeless elegance.

Her skin seemed almost unreal—radiant and healthy.

Rebecca's chest tightened, her heart churning with a sharp stab of envy.

If she hadn't been forced to uphold her polished socialite persona, Rebecca would have stormed over and confronted Gabriela on the spot.

Cindy, ever the eager sycophant, picked up on Rebecca's sour mood instantly and wasted no time piling on her sharp-tongued ridicule.

Shooting Gabriela a contemptuous look, she sneered, "So you're Gabriela? You really do carry that alluring edge I always imagined."

In front of the mirror, Gabriela turned gracefully, admiring the way the muted gray skirt suit traced her figure.

With a faint, self-satisfied smile, she didn't even bother meeting Cindy's gaze. Her reply was cold and dismissive. "I already know I'm beautiful—no need for you to point it out. And since I've never met you, your attempt at flattery is wasted."

The brazen confidence in her tone made Cindy's blood boil, leaving her seething at Gabriela's unabashed shamelessness.

Even the sales assistant couldn't hold back a laugh.

Gabriela's easy poise—her beauty, paired with her unshakable confidence—came off as unexpectedly charming rather than arrogant.

Cindy, however, boiled over, her voice rising sharp enough to cut the air. "What good is being pretty? Do you even belong in a store like this? You can't afford any of these clothes, can you? And even if you could, they'd never suit you." She leaned forward, her words laced with venom. "All the designer labels in the world can't buy you class. At your core, you're still nothing."

The more Cindy talked, the bolder her tone became.

Belonging to the Howard family—a lineage polished by a century of prestige—gave her a lofty standing. Even as a distant branch relative, she carried herself with an air she believed outshone Gabriela by countless measures.

Rebecca's expression finally eased, her lips curving faintly as Cindy's words lifted her spirits.

Rebecca's satisfied expression convinced Cindy that taunting Gabriela had been the right move.

Gabriela, however, gave them nothing. With a detached glance, she lazily motioned toward a rack of clothes. “Those three—take them off the rack.”

The sales assistant lit up, practically beaming as she rushed to gather the clothes Gabriela had indicated.

Rebecca sneered at the display, her eyes brimming with scorn at such brazen extravagance.

Cindy leaned forward with a mocking smirk. “Gabriela, word is that you swindled your way into more than a few projects. Doesn’t it bother you to live off money that filthy?”

Gabriela arched a brow, her gaze drifting deliberately to Rebecca. “Why should it? That money was practically shoved into my hands by Miss Howard herself.”

Rebecca’s face went scarlet with rage.

How could Gabriela speak with such brazen calm?

Wasn’t she afraid the Howard family might blacklist Haynes Group altogether, cutting off every deal they had in the business world?

Rebecca's eyes flared with heat, but instead of screaming, she forced her voice into a sharp, cutting retort. "Think of the money as my charity to you."

Chapter 584

Gabriela tilted her head back and laughed. "Well, thank you very much."

With a dismissive flick of her wrist, she turned to the sales assistant. "I'll take everything else except the ones in your hand. Please wrap them up."

Pulling a card from her purse, she handed it over. "Send the delivery there. Don't miss a thing."

She had the sales assistant pull those three pieces not because she intended to buy them—they were barely worthy of her interest—but as a prelude to her real goal: clearing out the entire store.

The sales assistant stood frozen in disbelief, lips parted as if she couldn't quite comprehend such extravagance. When the reality sank in, her face lit up with feverish excitement, her gaze clinging to Gabriela as though she were a walking fortune.

Gabriela offered her credit card with an easy, unhurried motion.

"Of course, madam. One moment, please," the sales assistant replied, her voice trembling with respect as she hurried to process the order.

Gabriela finally shifted her attention back to Rebecca, her smile edged with provocation. “You know perfectly well whose money is funding my purchase, don’t you, Miss Howard?”

Rebecca’s pulse spiked, her face blotching red.

Gabriela was rubbing her nose in it—paying with the Howard family’s money.

Though Rebecca prided herself on spending without restraint, she would never burn through money so brazenly.

The sting of humiliation sharpened her envy, feeding her fury.

Unhurried, Gabriela leaned back, her tone deceptively light. “Since it comes from your family, I can’t exactly vouch for how clean it is. Holding on to it feels suffocating. But running through every last cent?” She let the pause linger, eyes glinting. “That’s what puts me at ease.”

Rebecca’s hands clenched at her sides, knuckles whitening as her expression twisted with barely contained rage.

She pressed her nails deep into her palms, aching for a way to silence Gabriela once and for all.

Having just been scolded by both her father and her cousin, she could only choke down the venom boiling in her chest.

Gabriela, however, looked positively radiant, a teasing smile curling at her lips as she lifted her phone.

“Aubrey, are you free after work? Swing by my place and try on some clothes—you can take whatever catches your eye.”

Her laughter rang out, light and careless.

“Of course I’m serious. A suck-up went a little overboard and gifted me practically an entire boutique.”

Rebecca’s face tightened, jealousy twisting her expression until it was nearly unrecognizable, fury smoldering in every line of her features.

Cindy, though thrown off, quickly guessed Gabriela meant Rebecca when she called someone the big suck-up.

Still, she couldn’t quite untangle the tension between Rebecca and Gabriela and, not daring to invite trouble, she stayed quiet.

Gabriela, phone pressed to her ear, spoke with breezy amusement.

“Bring Nina, Cali, and the others too. The fabrics are top-tier, all straight from Fashion Lane. Take your pick, and don’t hold back. The bill’s already covered.”

Rebecca’s fury boiled over, her chest rising and falling in ragged bursts. Words failed her; all she wanted was to wring Gabriela’s neck and stitch her shameless mouth shut on the spot.

Chapter 585

Rebecca burned with rage, only to hear a soft chuckle drifting from nearby.

Fiona stood there, clearly amused.

She had been lingering on the sidelines for who knew how long, her gaze fixed on Gabriela with growing fascination.

In all of Okburg, it was rare to find anyone who could throw Rebecca so completely off balance.

In that instant, Fiona made up her mind—she would no longer oppose Gabriela.

After all, Brenden’s attention was already on her.

And more than that, Gabriela carried an irresistible, dangerous charm.

Rebecca turned sharply, her eyes narrowing into ice.

“Ms. Dewitt, what’s got you so entertained? I trust your injuries are healing well by now?”

The scandal from the Blue Star fiasco still had Rebecca as the target of ridicule among her so-called friends.

Her resentment toward Gabriela was matched only by her growing loathing for Fiona.

Fiona smirked.

“A few bruises on the skin aren’t much. Better than tossing away one hundred million for nothing and still getting slapped.”

Yesterday’s downfall spreading so far and wide was the last thing Rebecca had expected.

Her features contorted, caught between searing anger and raw humiliation.

“Fiona, do you have a death wish? How dare you talk to me like that!”

Fiona's eyes gleamed with mock sincerity.

"Not really. Just a heads-up. Don't strut around so smugly, or when you get home, your daddy's hand might leave another mark across that pretty face of yours."

At that moment, the sales assistant finished the transaction and offered Gabriela's card back with professional poise.

Utterly unbothered by the two pampered socialites bickering, Gabriela slipped the card into her bag and strolled out of the boutique.

Catching sight of her departure, Fiona abandoned the quarrel with Rebecca and rushed after her.

"Gabriela, hold on."

Gabriela paused, turning her head with a cool gaze.

"What is it, Ms. Dewitt?"

"Don't give me that look," Fiona replied evenly. "You and I aren't enemies."

Gabriela's eyes flickered with disbelief, and she pivoted without a word, striding away.

The idea of Fiona extending friendship was beyond absurd. It was unnatural—and when things defied reason, there was always a hidden catch.

Fiona strode briskly forward until she was right next to Gabriela.

“What's with that attitude? I've already humbled myself to approach you, and you still see me as nothing but an enemy?” Her voice sharpened, almost accusing. “Gabriela, are you seriously naive enough to think you could ever be my friend? If it weren't for Brenden, you'd never even get the chance to speak to me.”

She flashed a sudden, cunning smile.

“But you're not stupid. Why not join forces with me? We'll bring Rebecca down together. Then I'll marry Wesley, and you'll marry Brenden. Doesn't that sound perfect?”

Without pausing for Gabriela's reaction, Fiona added with mock warmth,

“Stick with me, and no one in Okburg will ever dare lay a finger on you again.”

Her chatter tumbled on and on, while Gabriela walked in silence, never sparing her a single reply.

Fiona's temper finally snapped. She yanked Gabriela's arm and hissed,

"What's that supposed to mean? I'm talking to you—can't you at least answer me?"

A shrill screech of brakes suddenly shattered the street noise.

Several hulking motorcycles barreled in from the corner, surrounding them in a tightening circle. Each rider brandished an iron rod, dragging the tips against the asphalt so that sparks skittered like angry fireflies.

Color drained from Fiona's face as she pressed,

"Gabriela, who did you piss off this time?"

Chapter 586

Gabriela didn't get the chance to answer—the red-haired leader advanced first, her neck marked by a coiling tattoo, her tone razor-sharp.

"Which one of you is Fiona Dewitt?"

Fiona was so shaken she couldn't even breathe, much less speak.

Gabriela raised her arm with cool indifference and leveled a finger at Fiona.

The red-haired leader snapped, her voice like a whip,

"Then you, get lost!"

Gabriela spun on her heel without hesitation and strode away.

Frozen in fear, Fiona blurted out,

"Gabriela, you're nothing but a heartless beast! After I promised to stand by you in Okburg, you abandon me the moment I'm in trouble?"

She had no clue who these bikers were, let alone how to bargain with them.

Gabriela had no intention of slowing down, only lengthening her stride to break away from Fiona.

Fiona stood rooted to the spot, her vision blurring with unshed tears.

“Gabriela, please—don’t leave me like this! Brenden has saved your life over and over. How can you just walk away from me now?”

Gabriela glanced back, her patience thinning. Fiona’s words were a jumble of nonsense.

“Brenden pulled me out of danger. What does that have to do with you?”

“Because Brenden has taken a beating for me!” Fiona’s voice cracked, trembling as she tried to steady herself. “If he finds out you abandoned me, he’ll hate you.”

The plea sounded absurd, yet Gabriela slowed, her thoughts snagging on it.

Brenden had shielded her countless times. Perhaps, just this once, helping Fiona could serve as repayment for his protection.

The red-haired leader lost her patience and snarled,

“Stop wasting my time! Are you leaving or what?”

Gabriela drew a steadying breath and ventured carefully,

“Sir, do you know Tyler?”

The red-haired leader’s expression twisted with fury, her eyes blazing.

“I’m a woman!”

Being mistaken for a man was what she hated most.

Gabriela rushed to correct herself.

“Miss, do you happen to know Tyler?”

The red-haired leader’s eyes narrowed, but some of the bite faded from her tone.

“Yeah. What’s wrong?”

Gabriela inclined her head politely.

“Would it be alright if I called Tyler over here?”

The red-haired leader’s brow furrowed.

“Go on then. Make the call.”

She leaned back with her arms folded, clearly curious to see what Gabriela wanted with him.

Roughly forty minutes later, Tyler finally showed up.

After only a few minutes of quiet conversation, he and the red-haired leader were clasping hands like old friends.

She turned to Gabriela with a laugh.

“What a tiny world. Turns out you’re close to Tyler. Pleased to meet you. My name is Kaylie Newman.”

Enchanted by Gabriela’s beauty and delighted to learn she was Tyler’s friend, Kaylie quickly suggested they become friends.

Gabriela offered a courteous smile.

“Nice to meet you.”

Kaylie smirked.

“A gorgeous face and good manners too. I bet you have lots of admirers.”

Gabriela tilted her head slightly.

“Could you tell me what you have against Fiona?”

Kaylie gave a clipped explanation.

She was a regular at Blue Star, drawn there because of Marcus. She had long set her sights on him, determined to win him over. But Marcus, proud to the point of arrogance, dismissed her outright, judging her too coarse to stand at his side as a girlfriend.

With no other way to catch his attention, she had kept pouring money into Blue Star, hoping persistence alone might change his mind.

Marcus had finally begun to waver under her reckless spending. But just as she thought she was making progress, Blue Star suddenly shut its doors.

Chapter 587

“At least before, I could flash my customer status and demand Marcus’s company, using that as an excuse to stay near him. Now that he’s out of work, whenever I look for him, he won’t even give me the time of day.”

The more Kaylie ranted, the more her temper flared. She jabbed a finger toward Fiona.

“And it’s all thanks to her and Rebecca! They’re the ones who got Blue Star shut down. Not a single one of them is getting away without paying!”

Fiona, who had been shrinking back in fear, finally broke.

“What’s that got to do with me? Gabriela was the one who ordered Marcus’s company that day!”

Gabriela opened her mouth to explain, but Kaylie smacked Fiona sharply on the head.

“You think I’m fucking stupid? The internet’s full of it, saying it was you and Rebecca. Don’t you dare try to drag Gabriela into your mess.”

Faced with such a hot-tempered woman, Fiona didn't dare utter another word.

Gabriela stepped in calmly.

"Kaylie, please, this whole thing is nothing but a misunderstanding. That day, Fiona only asked for Roderick. She never even spoke to Marcus. Could you let her off?"

Kaylie flicked her gaze toward Fiona.

"Fine. Since Gabriela is standing up for you, I'll give you a pass—for now."

With that, she marched away with her crew.

Fiona hissed, "Gabriela, you're the reason Blue Star shut down. So why am I the one being made the scapegoat?"

Gabriela brushed her off and turned to Tyler.

"Tyler, are you free today? Come over for dinner at my place."

Longing for Gabriela's cooking, Tyler agreed without hesitation. They made their way to the parking lot, Fiona trailing close behind.

Tyler, towering like an immovable mountain, spun around and shot her a cold glare.

"Get the hell out of my face."

Though cowed by his presence, Fiona still refused to retreat.

"Gabriela, you saved me today. Does that mean we're friends now?"

Her voice trembled—fear still lingered in her chest. What had unfolded today rattled her to the core. Only then did she truly grasp how safe she felt when Gabriela was near.

Gabriela's face stayed impassive.

"I did it for Brenden. Don't mistake it for anything else," she declared aloofly.

They were polar opposites, as incompatible as fire and water, destined never to become friends.

Yet no matter how Gabriela dismissed her, Fiona clung tightly, shadowing her every step—even following her all the way to her villa.

By chance, Loretta had come by to visit Gabriela and, upon spotting Fiona at her side, greeted her with delighted surprise. Gabriela couldn't very well turn Fiona away in front of Loretta, so Fiona smoothly managed to secure a seat at the dinner table.

Before long, word of Gabriela's purchase of all the clothes in Fashion Lane earlier that day reached Wesley's ears.

Billy relayed the news with disbelief.

Gabriela was truly unpredictable—no one could guess what surprise she would reveal next. She lived with a brilliance that even outshone many wealthy young ladies.

Wesley listened intently, half exasperated yet secretly entertained. Gabriela always managed to astonish him, chasing away the dullness of his routine.

With a faint smile, he tapped his long fingers against the desk.

"Put a few more of my properties in her name."

Now that she had learned how to burn through money, the Lakeshore Building alone might not be enough to satisfy her indulgence.

Billy bowed his head, accepted the order, and hurried off to carry it out.

Chapter 588

Gabriela had no idea Wesley had once again transferred several properties into her name.

She spent time in the kitchen with Ken, chopping and stirring as they prepared dinner for Loretta and Tyler.

Fiona, meanwhile, lingered nearby like an uninvited shadow, clearly there just to freeload, and Gabriela made a point of treating her as though she were invisible.

Just as the meal was about to begin, the rumble of a delivery truck broke the calm. Fashion Lane's crew carried in racks of clothing and boxes piled high with glossy new outfits.

Loretta, Farley, and Ken stared in bewilderment, their voices overlapping as they pressed Gabriela for an explanation.

Batting her long lashes, she offered a harmless lie, her doe-like eyes wide with innocence.

“Our company partnered with a fashion brand recently. These are sponsored pieces they sent over.”

Their jaws slackened in disbelief, but none of them questioned her further.

To them, Gabriela had always been the sweet, honest woman who would never tell a lie.

Aubrey, Tessa, Cali, and Nina turned up not long after.

Gabriela flashed a welcoming smile as she urged them to sit and eat. Soon the room bubbled with laughter as they all slipped into the new clothes, twirling and showing off to one another.

Fiona lingered on the edge of the gathering, her stomach twisting with bitterness.

Aubrey was nothing more than a sales clerk, and Tessa—well, her messy divorce had splashed across the news, dragging Gabriela into gossip right alongside her.

As for Nina and Cali, Fiona didn’t even consider them worth mentioning.

Yet here was Gabriela, doting on them, treating them with a warmth she never extended to her.

Envy prickled at Fiona's chest, her eyes stinging red with frustration.

Loretta glanced over at her and said gently,

"Fiona, why don't you pick out a few things for yourself?"

Fiona forced a careless shrug.

"My closet's already packed with more outfits than I can use."

Inwardly, she consoled herself: those clothes weren't even that nice, anyway.

Gabriela and her friends, oblivious to Fiona's sulking, spent the evening laughing as they tried on outfits one after another. Fiona sat stiffly in the corner, jaw tight, jealousy burning hotter with every passing minute.

Once they were done, Aubrey and Cali walked out with their arms loaded, more than a dozen bags swinging from their wrists. Their faces glowed as if they'd stepped into a fairy tale.

Aubrey couldn't hold back her excitement.

“Being friends with Gabriela is the best. You get a home-cooked dinner and designer clothes thrown in.”

Cali bobbed her head in agreement, eyes wide with wonder.

“I’ve never had so many gorgeous outfits in my life.”

Tessa and Nina kept their composure, yet a flicker of curiosity lingered in their eyes when Gabriela mentioned that mysterious wealthy flatterer circling around her.

Tessa leaned over curiously.

“Gabriela, who’s the wealthy guy showering you with clothes this time?”

Nina furrowed her brow with concern.

“If you accept all that, doesn’t it mean you’re accepting him too?”

Before Gabriela could answer, Fiona burst out laughing from the sidelines.

The idea of some rich heir chasing after Gabriela was just too much for her.

She laughed so hard she nearly doubled over, then whipped out her phone to text Rebecca.

“Miss Howard, you’re spoiling Gabriela so much that everyone thinks you’re her hopelessly devoted suitor.”

When Rebecca returned from Fashion Lane, she was seething with resentment toward Gabriela.

Reading Fiona’s message was like taking a hit straight to the ribs, sharp and merciless.

To be mistaken for some pathetic admirer—it was unbearable.

Chapter 589

At that moment, Fiona seemed even more infuriating than Gabriela herself.

Cindy noticed Rebecca’s stormy look and carefully offered her comfort.

“Rebecca, Gabriela’s just some undeserving girl who happens to stumble into luck. You don’t need to waste your thoughts on a pest like her.”

Rebecca snapped her gaze toward Cindy, eyes sharp as knives.

“So in your eyes, I’m not even on par with a pest?”

“That’s not what I meant at all,” Cindy blurted, bowing her head even lower, her tone full of deference.
“If you want to teach Gabriela a lesson, let me take care of it.”

Rebecca studied her in silence.

Gabriela was nothing but trouble—whoever clashed with her never came out unscathed.

Cindy, on the other hand, was reckless and far too simple-minded.

If Gabriela retaliated again, the fallout might drag her down as well.

Rebecca’s lips curved into a cold sneer.

“Forget it. Leave Gabriela alone for now.”

Cindy dipped her head in quiet obedience.

Yet inside, she was already plotting. Rebecca might tell her to back off now, but if she managed to quietly bring Gabriela down, Rebecca would surely see her in a new light.

Meanwhile, at Gabriela's house, Fiona fired off her message and leaned back with a smirk, picturing Rebecca's rage. The thought left her deliciously satisfied.

Because of that, she found her annoyance with Gabriela fading a bit.

Still, she believed Gabriela was a fool to reject her friendship.

Once the clothes were chosen, Gabriela escorted Aubrey and the others to the door. A sleek black Mercedes van idled by the curb.

She instinctively glanced at the license plate—it wasn't Wesley's.

Catching herself, she curved her lips in a self-mocking smile and turned back inside.

Once Gabriela's silhouette faded from sight, the tinted glass slid down to reveal Matthew's striking features.

His gaze lingered on the villa, sharp yet laced with tension.

“Dig into Gabriela and Wesley’s past,” he ordered, his voice tighter than he intended.

“Understood,” the driver answered promptly.

Staring at the worn building, Matthew exhaled a heavy breath.

He murmured, “Alanna... if Gabriela truly is our daughter, then where on earth are you?”

The driver, though discreet, was no ordinary servant. Once a decorated special forces soldier, he had served as Matthew’s driver and bodyguard for over a decade, his loyalty as unshakable as his skills.

Within days, he unearthed Gabriela’s history.

Her trail was not difficult to follow—twice she had become an internet sensation, her name plastered across headlines, making her past all too easy to investigate.

Matthew sat alone in his study, carefully combing through the stack of files.

When his eyes landed on her mother's name, followed by her uncle's, he froze, the color draining from his face.

So his instincts had been right all along—Gabriela was truly his daughter.

His daughter was not only alive, she was flourishing.

A rush of emotions surged through him, nearly knocking the breath from his chest. It took several long minutes before he could rein in the storm inside and force himself to keep reading.

Piece by piece, the connections between Gabriela and Wesley unfolded before him, an intricate web of ties stretching back years.

Then he picked up the flash drive his driver had handed over and began watching the videos one by one.

Onscreen, he saw Marie's desperate live-streamed suicide attempt, followed by her crazed smears against Gabriela, which had driven countless netizens to unleash a flood of vicious slander at her.

He watched Gabriela remain composed through it all, her calm gaze like steel against the storm.

Then came Farley's revelations—heart-wrenching footage and testimony exposing the misery of Gabriela's childhood, laid bare before the media.

Chapter 590

Matthew slipped off his glasses and pressed both hands to his face.

The image of a composed, dignified man near sixty shattered as sobs tore through him.

That was his daughter they were tormenting.

She was meant to grow up swathed in comfort, pampered like royalty—yet instead she had endured hardship from her earliest years.

He thought bitterly, “Alanna... I failed you. I should have protected our little girl.”

The grief swallowed him whole. He shut himself inside the study and did not emerge, not even when the scent of dinner filled the house.

Lauren rapped gently on the door, her voice soft with concern. “Honey, you haven’t eaten a thing all day. Tell me, what happened?”

Matthew offered a faint smile. “I just don’t feel like eating tonight. You and Rebecca go ahead without me.”

Though his voice stayed as calm and courteous as ever, Lauren caught the shadow of grief flickering in his eyes. She folded her hands together and murmured softly, "Whenever you're ready, tell me. I'll cook something just for you."

"Thank you," he replied, before gently shutting the study door once more.

He spent the night in silence, never returning to the bedroom, pacing through memories until dawn.

By the following day, the ache in his chest had grown unbearable, driving him to seek out Gabriela himself.

When he arrived at her villa, the sky was already brushed with the fading glow of sunset. He dared not knock on the door outright. For all his power as the head of the Howard Group, the thought of meeting his daughter left him strangely unsettled, hesitant like a man stripped of all defenses.

So he remained outside the gates, waiting hour after hour until his back stiffened and a dull ache spread across his shoulders.

The driver, seeing Matthew's haggard figure, offered softly, "Sir, should I check with the guards to see if she's home?"

Standing around without certainty seemed pointless, yet Matthew instantly shook his head and insisted, "No."

After missing more than twenty years of his daughter's life, how could he justify being impatient now?

Recognizing his resolve, the driver held his tongue.

By the time Gabriela finally appeared, nearly at eight o'clock, the streetlamps had flickered on. Work had kept her late, and exhaustion lingered in her steps.

She hadn't expected Matthew's presence, and when her eyes caught his, she froze briefly before quickening her pace. Pretending she hadn't noticed him at all, she slipped past.

Matthew quickened his steps and greeted her softly. "Miss Haynes, do you still remember me?"

She recognized him instantly, though her eyes narrowed with guarded suspicion.

"Mr. Howard, what exactly do you want from me?"

Her wariness weighed on him, and his voice grew even gentler. "I've been waiting here for half the day. Would you allow me to come in for a short chat?"

Suspicion flickered in her eyes, sharp and restless. Was he here to teach her a lesson for the sake of his daughter? If so, she would bolt without hesitation.

She had already braced herself to turn and run when his voice dropped, heavy with sincerity. “Rebecca was completely in the wrong last time. I owe you a sincere apology.”

“That won’t be necessary,” Gabriela stated in an even tone. “The matter’s already been settled. If Rebecca keeps out of my damn way, the evidence won’t resurface—but one step out of line, and it’s out.”

Matthew froze, caught off guard. So she believed he had come to silence her, to destroy the evidence?